

THE ATTITUDE OF AMERICA.

BY ROLAND HUGINS.

AN able American historian predicted at the beginning of this war that the United States would be pro-German in its sympathies within four months. He gave two reasons. The first was that the American mind would puncture the lid of lies which European diplomats had clamped over the explosion in July, 1914, and would begin to understand the real position in which Germany found herself. You see he was a philosophical historian. His second reason was that the German-Americans would argue the rest of us around to their point of view.

It is superfluous to say that the historian was mistaken. Not four months, but four times four months, have passed, and the United States is far from pro-German. Our pro-Ally contingent, most conspicuous in Boston and New York, is as violent as ever, both in its opinions and the expression of them. There exists, indeed, a very active and powerful element which is working—covertly for the most part—to involve the United States in a war with the Central Powers. The German-Americans have not argued us around. If they started out with such intention they have failed. Their protestations may have had some effect, but they themselves have been ridiculed, scolded, browbeaten, sneered at. To designate German-Americans, together with their friends the Irish-Americans and the Austrian-Americans, a new term of reproach has been invented, “hyphenates.”

THE GERMAN-AMERICANS.

The German-Americans have been cruelly misrepresented. There is no sounder or more desirable element in our population than our Teutonic blood. There is no element which has displayed devotion to the country, or civic or private virtue, in greater degree. Yet in these months of war they have been forced into a most distressing

position. They have daily read in the press the grossest insults to themselves and to the land of their ancestors. They constantly see the news poisoned by calumny and abuse. They live in a country which has declared its neutrality but which supplies in tremendous quantities the arms and ammunition to kill their kin, and they are powerless to hinder. When they have raised their voices in protest, their patriotism has been questioned. It is impossible to gauge the irritation, pain and humiliation they have suffered. Nevertheless it has sometimes struck me as odd that they have not made more headway against American prejudice. For they have been almost the sole champions of Germany's cause in America, and they have had a strong logical case to urge. And yet Americans, in the mass, have not been brought to see the validity of Germany's major contentions.

For one thing, German-Americans have not always been happy in their defense of Germany. They have sometimes used phrases to the detriment of facts. For example, in seeking to combat American misconceptions, some of them have asserted that Germany is "democratic" and that Germans enjoy "personal liberty." Now, to speak plainly, neither of these statements is true except in a qualified measure. No government which maintains such rigid property qualifications on voting as does Prussia, and which gives such large powers to a hereditary ruler, is democratic in the Anglo-Saxon sense. People who live under such a multitude of police regulations as do the Germans have not personal liberty in the American sense. German civilization shows many lofty virtues which other peoples envy and have not attained; but it is different from ours. These things have nothing to do with the case anyway. It is not our business to tell the Germans, who are free, enlightened, educated, what sort of government they shall prefer, any more than it is our business to tell the Chinese whether they shall have a republic or a monarchy. Americans, after all, are not so provincial as to want every nation cut from the same pattern,—least of all their own pattern.

And also, there is Mr. Wilson!

German-Americans have been censured for attacking President Wilson's foreign policy. This, of course, is unjust. The very persons who objected when German-Americans criticised the President for going too far, are now belaboring the President for not going far enough! But have German-American criticisms always been well directed? What, precisely, is the complaint they have to make against the administration's course?

In general, the accusation is this: that the United States has

been more neutral in name than in fact; that our neutrality has been highly prejudicial to Germany and highly benevolent to the Allies. The citizens of Germany and Austria, apparently, are convinced of this; they do not think this country gives them a square deal. Some Englishmen are candid enough to admit the same thing. G. Bernard Shaw recently said: "I may, however, remark, that America is not neutral. She is taking a very active part in the war by supplying us with ammunition and weapons and other munitions. Neutrality is nonsense." Quite as emphatic is Norman Angell: "Indeed, if we go below diplomatic fictions to positive realities, America is decisively intervening in the war; she is perhaps settling its issue by throwing the weight of her resources in money, supplies and ammunition on the side of one combatant against the other. The American government has without doubt scrupulously respected all the rules of neutrality. But it would have been equally neutral for America to have decided that her national interests compelled her to exercise her sovereign rights in keeping her resources at home at this juncture and to have treated combatants exactly alike by exporting to neither. This form of neutrality—just as legally defensible in the opinion of many competent American judges as the present one—would perhaps have altered the whole later history of the war. I am not giving you my own opinion, but that of very responsible independent American authorities, when I say that had American opinion been as hostile to the Allies as on the whole it has been to Germany, the campaign for an embargo on the export of arms or the raising of a loan would have been irresistible. You see I am speaking with undiplomatic freedom; saying out loud what everybody thinks."

The foregoing view, it seems to me, is unquestionably sound. The United States supplies munitions to the Allies not in normal quantities, but to the value of billions of dollars. Our plants are run to their full capacity; extensions are built; whole new factories are erected. War orders dominate for the moment our economic life. And all these supplies go to the enemies of Germany. We cannot expect a German to be much impressed by American preachments on "humanity" and "justice" when his sons have been shot by American bullets. And what galls the native German almost as much, I suspect, as the shipments of arms, which he knows to be technically legal, is the supine attitude of America toward Great Britain. We are not holding the balance even. British violations of neutral rights¹ are, from the standpoint of international law, more

¹ See *Economic Aspects of the War* by Edwin J. Clapp. New Haven, 1915.

reprehensible than Germany's submarine warfare, which was a policy of reprisal. Britain has killed our trade with Germany in non-contraband goods, although not maintaining even the semblance of a blockade of German ports; she has forbidden our trade with even neutral countries of Europe (while actively trading with those countries herself); she has stopped American vessels and taken off citizens; she has seized the mails of the United States. These arrogant violations of our rights are not merely technical; they are calculated to do the greatest possible amount of harm to the Central Powers; they were initiated frankly for the double purpose of starving Germany's population, and of effecting Germany's economic ruin. Neutrals be hanged; Britannia rules the waves!

What has the United States done to stop these wrongs? Obviously, nothing effective. Each new "blockade" order is more offensive than the last. It is illuminating to contrast the mild and polite protests of this government to England with the sharp, menacing language used to Germany. Whenever we have addressed ourselves to England or France we have said in effect: "My dear fellow, can't you see that you are in the wrong?" Whenever we have addressed ourselves to Germany or Austria we have said in effect: "You contemptible ruffian, quit that instantly!" We have used threats with Germany, persuasion with England. The result is that Germany has granted our demands, while England has grown more arrogant.

The United States, in order to make its neutrality one of fact and not of pretensions, must do one or the other of two things: must place an embargo on the export of arms, or break the British blockade. Perhaps the latter alternative is the more feasible. Unquestionably an embargo on munitions should have been undertaken at the beginning of the war, for both neutral and humanitarian reasons. But now, a year and a half later, it is possibly too late. Yet this swollen industry and these tremendous shipments of the instruments of death cannot be ignored. They overshadow every other relation of America to the struggle. They constitute us in fact an ally of the Allies. If they may not now be stopped, they lay on us the sternest obligation to make England toe the mark. That can be done; a serious threat of an embargo would help the British lion to see a gleam of reason. And unless we do this we may entirely forfeit the respect and friendship of the Central Powers,—a friendship we can ill afford to lose.

German-Americans, it seems to me, have wasted too much verbal shot and shell on President Wilson. After all Mr. Wilson

has kept us out of the fray. It is not hard to think of other prominent Americans who, in his place, would have embroiled us long ago! There are many of us who do not like Mr. Wilson's diplomatic methods; they verge too much on a policy of drift. But we prefer them to bellicose methods. The power of the President, moreover, has its limits. Congress has the authority to place an embargo on the export of arms; the Senate has the final word in foreign relations. German-Americans should work toward two ends, I think,—first, to make our neutrality genuine and impartial, and second and more important, to keep America out of the war. That danger has by no means passed. To accomplish these ends they should concentrate on American opinion, try to squeeze out of it unfairness, rancor and intolerance. Already they have accomplished something in this direction. The tone of American opinion has improved since the start of the war. But there still remains much ground to be ploughed.

THE AMERICAN VIEW.

The people of the United States have escaped the war fever, although persistent attempts are made to arouse them to a fighting mood. Beyond cavil the citizens of this country are bent on peace.

Rudyard Kipling, whose occupation these days is to out-Junker the Junkers, has proposed the pleasant little toast; "Damn all neutrals!" Undoubtedly Mr. Kipling cocked a baleful eye at the United States when he uttered this. We could afford to smile at Mr. Kipling's spleen if he stood alone. But within the last year many militant non-combatants among the Allies have cast baleful glances at the United States. The indifference of America offends them as deeply, apparently, as the hatred of their enemy. Why, they ask with a gesture of impatience, should Americans stand aside in this crisis of civilization? Why should they allow others to fight their battle for them—the battle of liberty and democracy? And these critics of ours in England and France are none too delicate in attributing motives for this Yankee apathy toward their noble cause. They insinuate we are too busy making dollars out of others' distress to heed the call of the spirit, and they frankly hint that when we say we are too proud to fight we mean too cowardly.

A number of Britons have recently unburdened themselves on this subject of American neutrality.² Let me quote a few of the choicer passages:

"We fight not merely for our threatened selves; we fight for

² *Everybody's Magazine*, January, 1916.